

SANDWELL HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT DIAGNOSTIC

DIAGNOSTIC REPORT SUMMARY

LEADERS, CABINET AND DIRECTORS MEETING

24TH JULY 2024

Corporate transformation programme

SEND Transport Diagnostic Review



This SEND Transport Diagnostic Review is a key component of our [Big 11 corporate transformation programmes](#). These programmes were identified by the Council as major transformational workstreams essential for aligning with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Outcomes

Our goal is to achieve significant improvements, including:

- Improved child welfare
- Better residential placement stability
- Enhanced transport services

Target Savings

By optimising our spending, through better service coordination, we aim to achieve:

- **2024/25:** £700,000 in savings
- 2024/25: £7M budget pressure estimated
- **2025/26:** £700,000 in savings
- 2025/26: £7M+ potential pressure (refer to "do nothing" modelling)

Transformation Partners

We have partnered with Newton Europe for the diagnostic phase, ensuring we apply best practices and innovative solutions.

Cross Council Approach

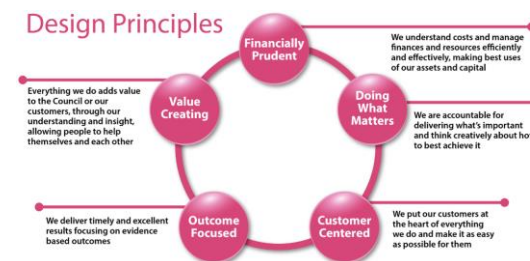
To ensure a comprehensive and effective transformation, we are taking a cross-council approach that integrates various departments and services:

- **Finance:** Funding allocation for service improvements.
- **HR:** Recruitment and training for specialised roles in SEND transport.
- **Support Services:** Coordination with social services and educational bodies.
- **Comms:** Communication strategy development to engage parents/carers, educators, and community stakeholders.

Design Principles

Our design principles are:

- Financially prudent
- Value creating
- Customer-centred
- Outcome focused



Behaviours Framework

We are committed to fostering a sense of unity, ensuring accountability, maintaining a customer-focused approach, setting ambitious targets, and promoting inclusivity in educational and care environments.

Sandwell are currently experiencing significant cost pressures in home to school transport, and are considering engaging a strategic partner to support in tackling this

Sandwell and National Context

National spending on home to school transport is forecast to reach ~**£2.6B** by financial year 2027/28. Like many other councils across the country, Sandwell are experiencing increasing budget pressures well in excess of inflation.

In recent years, demand for home to school transport has risen significantly, from 600 children and young people, to over 1000 per year. This is expected to increase further given forecasted growth in Education, Health and Care plans in the borough.

The local policy was reset in 2019 (and is aligned to national policies) and is considered robust, especially for post-16s, however the **consistent and standardised** application of this policy is a key area of focus.

On top of this, the cost of transport has also increased; the current market context for providing home to school transport is challenging, with only 7 providers actively contributing and responding to commissioned work, and the market being somewhat transient. A re-procurement exercise is currently underway (SEND 3), with positive initial engagement, including from some national providers.

Home to School Transport Diagnostic

Sandwell want to put even more focus and momentum behind transforming their Home to School Transport Services, with the intention being to improve the services and experiences for all children and young people involved, and their families and carers, across the borough.

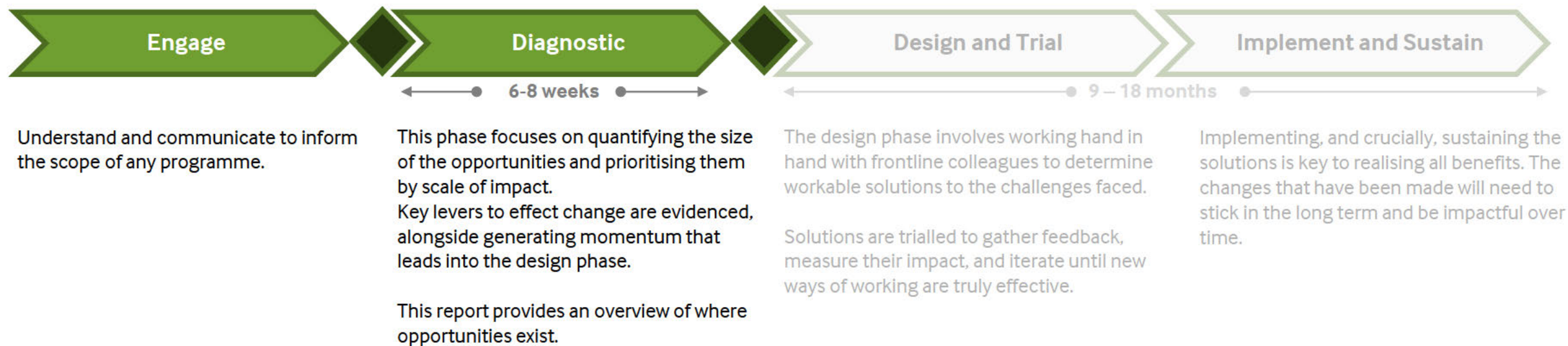
Challenges across the service prevent Sandwell from delivering the exceptional service they aim to provide. This is highlighted when processes don't support practice, or when the right services and transport options aren't available.

To root cause existing pressures, a frontline-focused, detailed assessment of the processes, ways of working, and their impact, has been completed by Newton Europe. The diagnostic sought to understand the drivers of increased costs to deliver home to school transport, identify potential solutions, and quantify the impact.

Focus areas explored during the diagnostic include:

1. **Travel Assistance Eligibility:** Are the children and young people receiving assistance eligible in line with national policy? Is there an opportunity to better meet their needs through other travel assistance options?
2. **Transport Optimisation:** Are the transport routes and vehicles used the best option for children and young people, and what is the opportunity to optimise these?
3. **Procurement and Commissioning:** Do we have the right frameworks with our providers that deliver on flexibility, quality, and good value for money?
4. **Annual Reviews and Planning for Independence:** How are we reducing the reliance and need for transport and passenger assistance support over time? Are annual reviews effective and are we effectively planning for independence, making best use of Independent Travel Training?

Newton's approach to change is built on extensive engagement and a robust evidence base to build buy-in and momentum for change



The diagnostic engagement for Home to School Transport has been

- **Outcome-focused**, in the belief that the implementation of changes will enable financial savings
- A **partnership**, mixing the respective skills and experiences of Sandwell and Newton colleagues
- Centred around **practical engagement** of colleagues throughout the service in relation to the challenges and opportunities for improvement
- **Rigorous**, to ensure that the output and associated benefits are 100% deliverable
- Reflective of the **context** across the service and wider system, and understanding of the key **differences between teams** within Sandwell
- Rooting solutions to local context, ensuring they would be tailored and owned by teams involved
- Respectful, but challenging

A data-led approach guided key activities during the diagnostic in Sandwell

A rigorous, evidence-led approach was undertaken, which uses a blend of activities to determine key quantitative and qualitative insights, and to inform the potential for improvement across outcomes for children and young people, financial savings, and colleague engagement, as well as highlighting the challenges facing Sandwell in carrying out change.



'Best Outcome' Case Review Workshops

Front line multidisciplinary colleagues actively participating in the collaborative review of children's journeys and support, and together discussing and exploring the travel assistance support we offer for children and young people.

1000+ individual children and young people's transport journeys and details were aggregated from 50+ spreadsheets into a single database



Live Studies & Should Cost Methodology

Detailed process mapping and understanding of key constraints in processes. Working with your team to build a detailed understanding of how much contracts 'should cost' from granular local data, public data, studies and research alongside a commercial review of the negotiation process

Detailed 1:1s with all leaders combined with a 50% response rate to a cultural survey from ILS, Admin and Transport Team and TAS

Over 200 children and young people's journeys reviewed in detail with 10+ practitioners



Data Analysis

Analysing data from core operational systems and wider sources, for examples, informal and formal data capture, to understand baselines, trends, patterns, and variation, to build an evidence base and identify new areas of potential.

10+ parent and carers calls shadowed, 30+ detailed reviews of the travel assistance application forms and detailed discussions to build bottom up should costs for our contracts



Discussions with Key Stakeholders

Leverage and augment the expertise that already exists within SMBC and partners, from front line staff through to executive suite, to test findings and hypotheses that have been developed from analysis.

Executive Summary of SEND Home to School Transport Diagnostic – June 2024

Home to School SEND Travel Assistance in Sandwell

Sandwell spend in FY 23/24 was £9.6m greater than the base budget on SEND Home to School Transport, with costs expected to rise further due to increasing demand over the coming years.

To address this, a comprehensive approach to reimagining travel assistance support is proposed, focusing on 1) policy application regarding eligibility, 2) travel assistance that promotes planning for independence, 3) effective independent travel training, 4) vehicle optimisation, 5) vehicle contract commissioning and procurement, 6) data capture and visibility, and 7) fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement among colleagues.

Eligibility and Optimal Outcomes

62% of requests are for travel assistance to special schools or colleges, and the number of EHCPs in special schools has risen by 17% in the past 2 years. Special school capacity in borough is reaching capacity, so wider SEND System transformation is needed alongside travel assistance transformation.

Case reviews indicate that the policy (in line with national policy) for travel assistance eligibility is inconsistently applied, with approximately 5% of children and young people currently receiving support potentially not meeting the criteria. Standardising policy application is crucial, especially for those living < 3 miles from school and post-16s.

Independent travel training is underutilised; currently, only 36% of children are referred, and of these, 6% are found suitable. Leveraging this training more effectively could result in better outcomes for young people on their journey into adulthood.

Local authority vehicles appear to be the 'default' assistance option, with only 22% of introductory phone calls with parents and carers exploring alternative options, highlighting a need for improved engagement and consideration of potentially more suitable travel assistance options.

Note: Ahead of further design, and throughout the implementation of change initiatives, Parent and Carer and Operator engagement would be a core activity to build on the views of practitioners that were gathered throughout the diagnostic, and to test the feasibility of changes.

Vehicle Optimisation & Contract Commissioning

There is an opportunity to optimise vehicle utilisation by reassessing passenger composition and refining travel routes, reducing the number of vehicles required. The vehicle procurement framework is being reconsidered (SEND 3), aiming to regain control over rising contract costs; however, a revised approach is recommended ahead of the 2025/26 academic year, leveraging improved data integration, contract variation and should-cost analyses, and engagement of the provider market, to ensure a robust and sustainable approach to contract commissioning in the future.

Data Visibility and Process Oversight

The diagnostic highlighted that data capture is often manual (effective use of the Synergy system is inconsistent), error-prone, and fragmented across spreadsheets, requiring extensive cleaning before analysis. To enable data-led decision-making, improvements are needed across data structure, capturing process, analysis, and colleague capability.

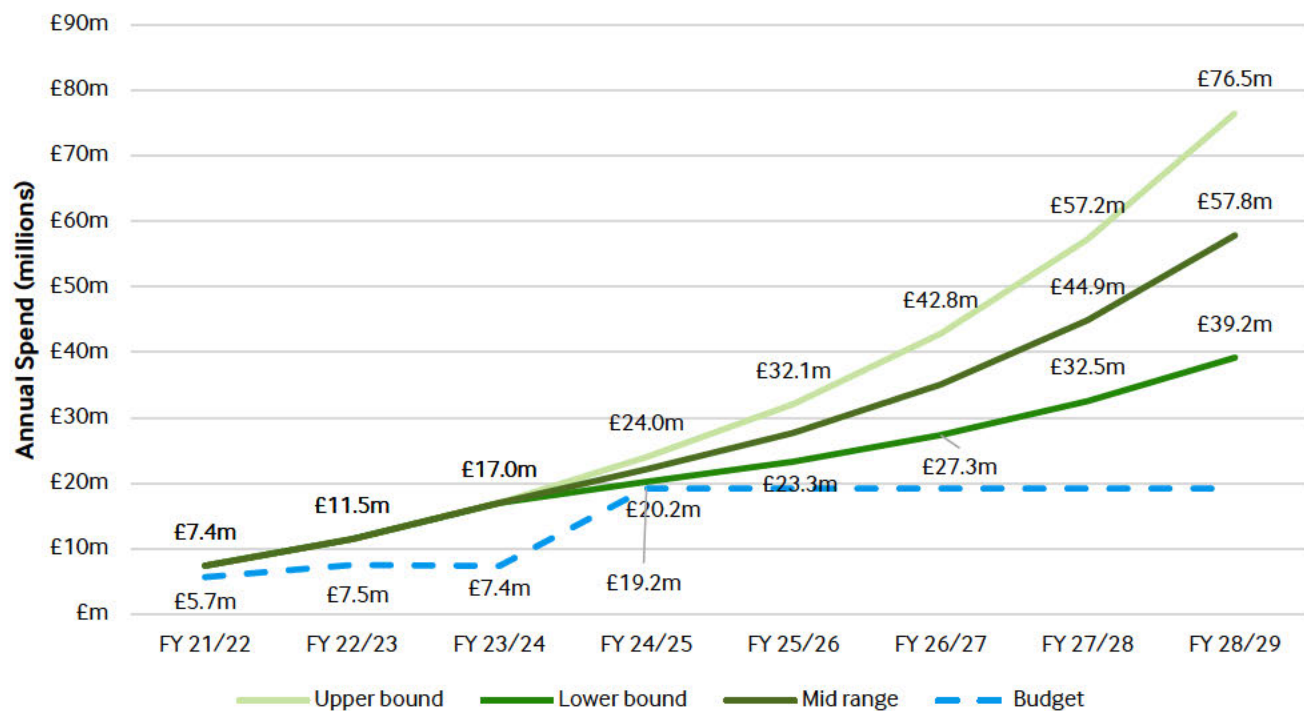
Environment for Change

Creating an environment open to change is crucial in ensuring that any improvements made are effective, sustainable, that challenges are resolved proactively and collaboratively, and that knowledge is shared and retained across teams.

Forecast “do nothing” scenarios indicate Home to School Transport spend could increase to £39m - £77m by FY28/29

Through meetings with finance, performance and operational colleagues, we have looked at historical demand for different travel assistance methods and associated weekly unit costs combined. These historical trends along with agreed assumptions on likely future events, have been used to build a set of forecasts for what we expect spend to do in the future. Cost assumptions have been combined across mileage, PTB, and fleet contracts. Other spend has been assumed to remain constant at £200k each year.

HTS Spend Forecast



Key assumptions

- **Mileage:** Mileage allowance remains fixed and the increase in total claimants continues into the future
- **Personal Transport Budgets:** the current banding rates remain the same as today. Whilst the number of children and young people receiving PTBs has dropped, this has been fixed at today's number of claimants going forwards
- **Local Authority Vehicles:** We have seen that increasing number of EHCPs (upstream of the travel assistance process), results in greater children and young people require transport. The LA SCAP EHCP forecast (shown below) has been used to model what we expect the LA Transport demand to be in the future (assuming the % of EHCPs requiring transport remains fixed at 29%). Lower bound assumption assumes average cost of transport remains the same as today whilst the UB assumes the rate of increase as seen historically for the past 2 years

	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29
SCAP EHCP forecast	4121	4773	5622	6715	8112
% of EHCPs receiving transport	29%				
# of CYPs receiving travel assistance	1199	1389	1636	1954	2361

Approach to financially valuing opportunities

1

Build “do nothing scenarios”

Looking at historical demand for different travel assistance methods and associated weekly unit costs combined with creating assumptions of what we expect to happen, build a set of forecasts for what we expect spend to do in the future

2

Understand how different opportunities will impact CYP

For each opportunity define what we expect the impact on CYP to be

3

Create equations that link this impact to financial impact

Agreement on the logic which connects an operational KPI (i.e. care starts avoided) to a financial benefit

4

Agreeing baselines for variables

Agreement on the baseline for variables (both operational and financial), which have been calculated from data returns

5

Targets

After core diagnostic activity (case reviews, deep dives, etc.) has been completed, agreement on the target improvement (i.e. increase in % of CYP accessing travel training) which we collectively agree is attainable through operational improvement.

6

Benefits profiling

Agreeing a set of assumptions that will enable us to profile this benefit over time

Understanding risks and feasibility

- In developing the target and stretch values for each opportunity, the following data sources were triangulated to provide confidence in the impact we could have on Children and Young People:
 1. Local Benchmarking
 2. Historical Data Analysis
 3. Outputs from Case Reviews
 4. Live Studies alongside Sandwell colleagues

To account for the feasibility of delivering the change and potential risks to implementation, several aspects were factored into the benefits equations. This was done through “confidence weighting” each of the opportunities, resulting in a target and stretch range for each. Below are some of the example risk factors including in the opportunities:

- How will parents and carers react to changes to eligibility or them choosing a different offer?
 - We have assumed that any changes to CYP only occurring the following academic year
- How would operators react to changes to routes and vehicle optimisation?
 - We have assumed that these changes can only be made when we retender for contracts, and only 33% of operators accept the new changes.

Ahead of further design, and throughout the implementation of change initiatives, Parent and Carer, and operator engagement would be a core activity to build on the data and views of practitioners gathered throughout the diagnostic, and to test the feasibility of changes. This was limited in June 2024 due to SEND 3 and the general election.

A transformation programme could deliver the following sets of opportunities over the MTFS

Incremental spend reduction each year based off the LB scenario of the “do nothing” scenario

Opportunity Description	Target								Stretch							
	#Children & Young People Impacted	MTFS Spend Reduction						Cumulative over MTFS	#Children & Young People Impacted	MTFS Spend Reduction						Cumulative over MTFS
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	Total			24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	Total	
Are all children & young People in Sandwell that currently receive travel support assistance eligible based on Sandwell’s transport policies?	18	£0.0m	£0.2m	£0.1m	£0.0m	£0.0m	£0.3m	£0.9m	18	£0.0m	£0.4m	£0.3m	£0.0m	£0.0m	£0.8m	£2.7m
Could children and young people be more independent when travelling to school and how could we better prepare children and young people for adulthood?	17	£0.0m	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.0m	£0.1m	£0.4m	£1.1m	24	£0.0m	£0.2m	£0.2m	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.6m	£1.7m
Are we maximising the take up of the best travel assistance offer for Parents and Carers based on their situation and need?	34	£0.0m	£0.3m	£0.3m	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.7m	£2.1m	134	£0.0m	£1.2m	£1.1m	£0.4m	£0.5m	£3.2m	£9.3m
Could we optimise the number of vehicles needed to transport children to school?	310	£0.0m	£0.9m	£0.7m	£0.3m	£0.0m	£1.9m	£6.2m	420	£0.0m	£1.2m	£1.1m	£0.4m	£0.0m	£2.7m	£8.8m
Are the right children and young people who need passenger assistance receiving this support when being transported?	43	£0.0m	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.0m	£0.0m	£0.2m	£0.8m	43	£0.0m	£0.2m	£0.1m	£0.0m	£0.0m	£0.3m	£1.1m
Could we reduce the variation and average cost we are paying for transportation across our operators?	All CYP receiving transport	£0.0m	£0.8m	£0.9m	£0.6m	£0.4m	£2.7m	£7.4m	All CYP receiving transport	£0.0m	£1.8m	£2.1m	£1.4m	£1.0m	£6.3m	£17.4m
Total	-	£0.0m	£2.3m	£2.2m	£1.1m	£0.6m	£6.1m	£18.5m	-	£0.0m	£5.0m	£4.9m	£2.3m	£1.6m	£13.8m	£41.0m
Could we take a more radical approach to post 16 travel assistance?	<i>Sandwell currently spend £5.4m (FY 23/24) on transport for post-16s. A more radical approach to policy application could result in the savings highlighted</i>							£2m	To achieve these savings we should need to make a strategic direction change for the travel assistance offered for post 16s.						£4m	

A transformation programme could deliver the following sets of opportunities over the MTF5

Incremental spend reduction each year based off the LB scenario of the “do nothing” scenario

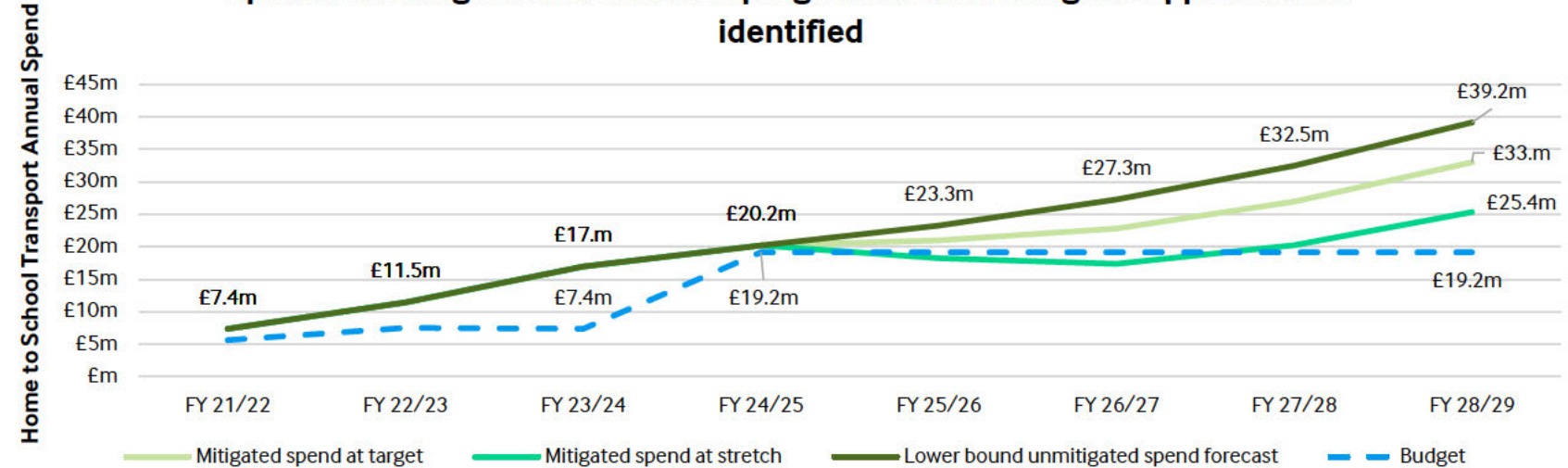
The lower bound spend forecast assumes a ‘frozen’ cost for local authority vehicles contracts in FY23/24 onwards, based on the expected impact of SEND3.

The opportunities and spend reduction over time is in relation to that lower bound forecast and does not assume any increase in transportation, car mileage or personal transport budget costs.

Should the average cost of transport increase vs today’s baseline cost, then the forecast spend inc. mitigations would be higher than shown here.

In FY 28/29, if the average cost of transport remains the same and the opportunities are delivered, the total HTS spend could be £6-14m lower than forecast.

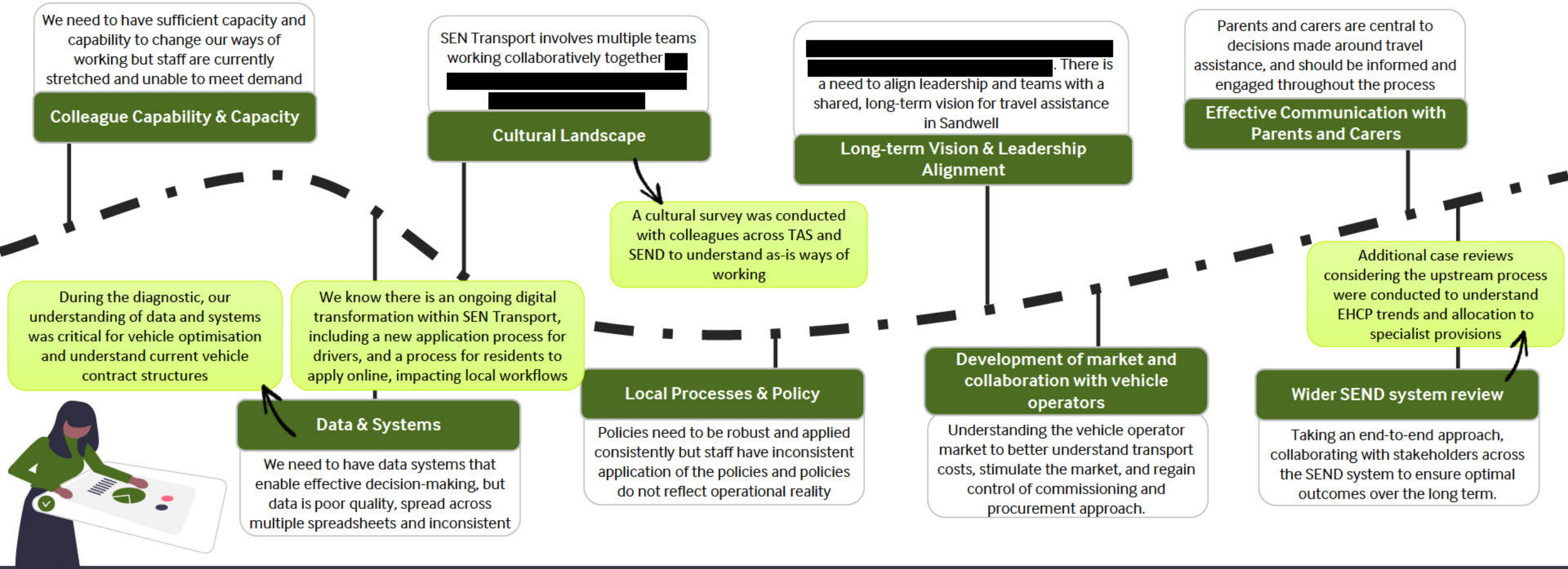
Home to School Transport Forecast Do Nothing Scenario and expected target spend following a transformation programme delivering the opportunities identified



	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 23/24	FY 24/25	FY 25/26	FY 26/27	FY 27/28	FY 28/29
Lower Bound Unmitigated Spend forecast	£7.4m	£11.5m	£17.0m	£20.2m	£23.3m	£27.3m	£32.5m	£39.2m
Target Spend reduction (cumulative)					£2.3m	£4.5m	£5.6m	£6.1m
Stretch Spend reduction (cumulative)					£5.0m	£9.9m	£12.3m	£13.8m
% target - stretch reduction of spend					10-22%	16-36%	17-38%	16-35%
Forecast Spend (at target)					£21.0m	£22.8m	£27.0m	£33.0m
Forecast Spend (at stretch)					£18.3m	£17.4m	£20.3m	£25.4m

Achieving Better Outcomes and Financial Savings is Dependent on Several Enablers

Achieving financial savings relies on both the implementation of improvement initiatives, as well as key enabling changes that are essential for initiating sustainable transformation of Home to School travel assistance:



Designing and implementing change to SEND Home to School Transport: key considerations

This report summarises several opportunities to improve home to school travel assistance support for children and young people in Sandwell, supporting them on their journey to independence, whilst maintaining a high quality and dependable service, and ensuring the council is taking a cost-effective approach throughout.

Below are some of the key considerations for Sandwell to consider when consider how to realise the opportunities:



Approach to Transformation

- **Scale and scope of transformation:** Determining whether improvement will be made within existing systems and structures, or whether a wider system re-design is more appropriate to improve service provision
- **Timeframe:** Establishing a clear timeline for each phase of implementation, considering any other ongoing transformation initiatives, and external factors.
- **Set up:** Determining which opportunities will be pursued as part of a transformation programme, and what their impact is expected to be, making strategic decisions along the way



Resource and Support

- **Gap analysis of current capacity and capability** across Sandwell's teams, identifying any areas that need to be addressed before a transformation programme is launched
- **Evaluation of the need for external support** to supplement and support in-house transformation capacity and process improvement expertise. Identifying potential partners for the process.

Key Strategic Decisions For Sandwell

The launch of a design and implementation phase is dependent on a number of decisions being made – this includes but isn't limited to:

- ✓ How does Home to School Transport fit as a part of a wider transformation across the whole SEND System and pathway?
- ✓ How does the length of the contracts being retendered as part of SEND3 impact the transformation timelines?
- ✓ What is the travel offer and approach in we want to offer across Sandwell, and for post-16 travel assistance specifically?
- ✓ What approach are we taking to annual reviews as part of wider SEND transformation?
- ✓ What is the appetite for an in-house fleet of vehicles supporting home to school transport?
- ✓ Do we want to change our operating model and structure of teams to address the cultural barriers identified?
- ✓ Who do we want to be a part of transformation team and what skills and capacity do they have?
- ✓ What level of data integration do we want across our teams and services and what capability do we have to support digital innovation and products?

Reporting timeline

Meeting	Purpose
<p>Children's Transformation Board 4th July 2024</p>	<p>Internal subject matter expert sign off within the overall Children's Transformation Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of proposed savings identified • Subject to policy and decision making • Recommendations to CTB around next phases of project
<p>Leaders, Cabinet and Director's Meeting 10th July 2024</p>	<p>Introduce the SEND Transformation as a part of the Corporate Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of Newton • Timeframes with phasing of the work.
<p>Corporate Transformation Board 12 July 2024</p>	<p>To share the draft report with the CTB members for comment and sign off.</p>
<p>Senior Leadership Team 16th July 2024</p>	<p>To brief SLT on work to date, share the findings report and proposed next steps.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member /Leader Portfolio Briefing 16th July 2024</p>	<p>To update the Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Families and share a copy of the draft report for comment.</p>
<p>Leaders, Cabinet and Director's Meeting 24th July 2024</p>	<p>To share the final diagnostic report form Newton with the Leader and Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Diagnostic Report • Next steps progress with suggested solutions • Procure design / pilot and implementation/ sustain • Budget

Are there any questions on the executive summary of the diagnostic?

Discussion on next steps to follow this presentation

DETAILED EVIDENCE



Eligibility: focus areas and findings

Context

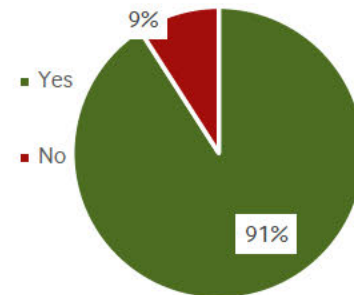
We've seen a **52% increase** in children and young receiving travel in Sandwell over the past 3 years. In 2023/24, 612 cases were reviewed by the SEN travel assistance panel, of which **78% were eligible**. Most applications are from children/young people attending special schools and colleges, so eligibility criteria for travel assistance are likely to be met.

To better understand the impact of upstream decision-making on transport assistance demand, **22** case deep dives were conducted with practitioners to consider the most ideal setting for children/young people to achieve their outcomes. Practitioners found that in **5%** of cases, a child/young person could have been supported without an EHCP, and **9%** could have been in a more ideal provision.

Further diagnostic activity to look at the end-to-end SEND system would be needed to further understand how to manage this growing demand and meet need in the best way.

Within the scope of the diagnostic, understanding whether eligibility criteria are applied in line with national policy and in a standardised way was a key focus area. 202 cases were reviewed alongside 10+ practitioners during the diagnostic to understand the application of [eligibility criteria](#); a representative sample was selected.

Was the child/young person in the ideal setting?

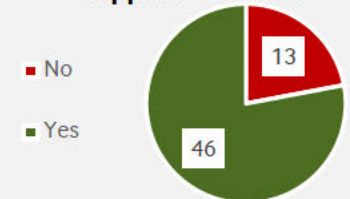


Summary of Findings

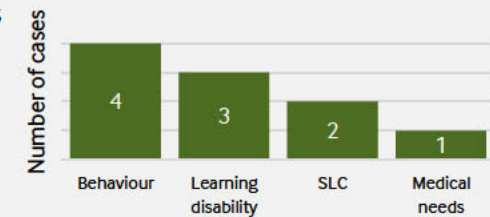
Cases that seemingly fall outside of eligibility criteria were focused on:

- In **78% of cases where the home to school distance is under 3 miles**, the child/young person was found eligible for transport based on Sandwell's policies. Predominantly, this was due to eligibility for free school meals, which reduces the required threshold to 2 miles. Other cases were predominately due to physical disabilities, which mean the child or young person cannot be reasonably expected to walk to school.
- 22% of cases where home to school distance is < 3 miles** were ineligible. The primary reasons practitioners felt that individuals were receiving travel assistance despite this were due to eligibility not being reassessed over time, or a difference in applying the needs-based criteria across practitioners.
- For **post-16 cases**, Sandwell policy states that alternative funding should be explored prior to applying for travel assistance, but **24%** of cases reviewed had evidence that this was explored. Re-applications for post-16 support should be annual, but the average time since the last application was **13 months**.

Were those applying for support <3 miles?



What needs did practitioners vary on when reviewing eligibility?



Opportunity and next steps in relation to Home to School transport eligibility in Sandwell

To access the opportunity outlined, there are several key considerations to take forward into a transformation design phase

How do we ensure policy is applied in a standardised, consistent, and fair way across all children and young people?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- 5% of cases currently ineligible, which are cases with a distance under 3 miles, with various interpretations of the policy regarding need causing variation.
- Standardised and complete information is currently not captured to enable informed eligibility decisions to be made.
- Currently, there is inconsistent application of local and national policy.

How do we build trust in parents that the best outcome decisions are being made for support for their CYP

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- We have been unable to capture parent and carer voices throughout the diagnostic.
- Changing the eligibility of children and young people can significantly impact parents and carers.
- Understanding parent and carer views on post-16 provision on young people's journey to adulthood

Enablers for this opportunity

Effective Communication with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers need to be informed of any changes to eligibility, before final decisions are made, so circumstances can be taken into consideration

Colleague Capability & Capacity

We need to have sufficient capacity and capability to change the ways in which we consistently apply policy

Cultural Landscape

SEN Transport involves multiple teams working collaboratively together

Local Processes & Policy

How do we apply policy consistently for eligibility? What is the approach Sandwell wants to take for post 16 given the more radical approaches taken by other LAs?

Wider SEND system review

Taking an end-to-end approach, collaborating with stakeholders across the SEND system to ensure optimal outcomes over the long term.

ITT and Annual Reviews: focus areas and findings

Context

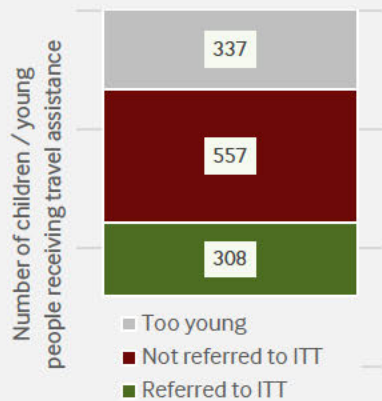
Sandwell's policies and the SEN Code of Practice outline how we should be supporting children and young people be more independent when travelling to school and preparing them for adulthood:

- EHC plans should be used to actively monitor children and young people's progress towards their outcomes and longer-term aspirations and must be reviewed by the local authority as a minimum every 12 months.
- Local authorities must ensure that the EHC plan review at Year 9, and every review, thereafter, includes a focus on preparing for adulthood
- All eligible pupils from year six (transition year to secondary school), will be expected to undertake travel independence training unless they are assessed by professional advisors, as being unlikely to benefit from such training.

Summary of Findings

Practitioners from the TAS, SEND Admin and Transport, and SEND Assessment and Reviews team reviewed 143 children/young people over the age of 11.

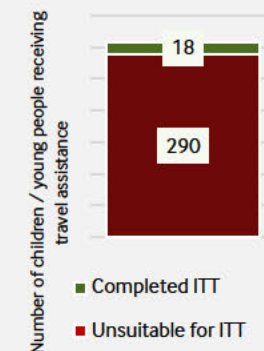
72% of those currently receiving travel assistance would be eligible for Independent Travel Training (ITT) based on their age (11+). However, only **36%** are referred to ITT at the moment. **62%** of those not referred began to receive travel assistance *after* age 11 and should have been referred then.



For 143 cases reviewed, it had been **1.5 years** (average) since the last review. When reviews do take place, in only **30%** of cases there was evidence of on planning for travel independence. Even if ITT was highlighted as beneficial for the individual and supporting their goals, there was no evidence that they were then referred to ITT. In fact, from ITT data, there were no referrals made to the service following an annual review. **94%** of referrals were made at the point of an initial travel assistance request.

ITT data shows there were **18** referrals accepted by the service in the past year (scaled from the part-year data). These children/young people completed the independent travel training, and all of them can now travel to school independently, utilising public transport. However, **94%** of children and young people referred to ITT were found unsuitable. For **65%** of these cases, this is due to their SEND needs. For most other cases, this is due to journey complexity or duration. The ITT team report not always having the specific information needed to hand to make an informed decision on the suitability of each child and young person to the ITT offer.

What is the outcome of CYP referred to ITT?



Opportunity and next steps in relation to Independent Travel Training and Annual Reviews in Sandwell

To access the opportunity outlined, there are several key considerations to take forward into a transformation design phase

What is the ambition for our ITT service and how should we deliver on this ambition?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- Following annual reviews, children and young people are not referred to independent travel training
- Most of the referrals received by the ITT are not appropriate or do not have sufficient information to make the right decisions
- The amount of training the team can offer is currently limited

What is the approach we should be taking to annual reviews given capacity constraints?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- Planning for independence and travel training is only discussed 30% of the time as part of an annual review

Enablers for this opportunity

Effective Communication with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers need to be informed of any changes to eligibility, before final decisions are made, so circumstances can be taken into consideration

Colleague Capability & Capacity

We need to have sufficient capacity in our teams to do reviews and within our ITT to take on an increased number of referrals

Cultural Landscape

We need all of our teams to be thinking about independence for children and young people and consistently talking about it in the same way

Long-term Vision & Leadership Alignment

What is the vision for ITT and are we aligned on what we want to achieve for children and young as they move into adulthood?

Wider SEND system review

We need to ensure we are able to complete reviews in a timely manner and consider changes to travel assistance and ITT opportunities when doing so

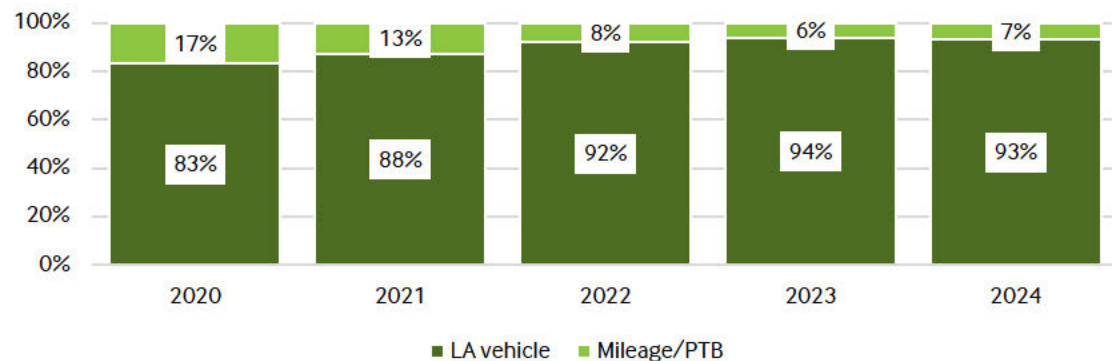
Optimal offering: focus areas and findings

Context

Sandwell have 2 non-local authority vehicle offers (Personal Transport Budgets, and mileage), whereas other local authorities where benchmarking data was collected have 1 alternative offer. The Personal Transport Budget offer in Sandwell is generous compared to benchmark data from other Las [though this information is not published or publicly available].

Over the last 3 years, the increase in home to school spend is primarily driven by Local Authority vehicle fleet contracts. Only **14.7%** of travel assistance is provided through Mileage/PTB. This proportion is declining, with just **6.5%** of requests over the last year resulting in Mileage/PTB, compared with **16.7% four years ago**.

Each year fewer opt for Mileage/PTB offer

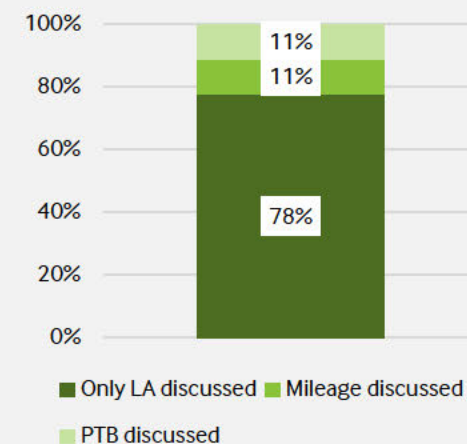


Summary of Findings

The appropriate travel assistance option is discussed with parents/carers during introductory calls, before a decision is made. During the diagnostic, 9 phone calls with parents/carers were shadowed.

In **78%** of calls shadowed, there was no evidence of the car mileage offer or the personal transport budget offer being discussed with parents and carers – these offers were only discussed if the parent/carer brought it up first. LA vehicles were treated as the default.

What % of calls shadowed was the personal transport budget or car mileage offers discussed?



Opportunity and next steps in relation to Home to School transport offers in Sandwell

To access the opportunity outlined, there are several key considerations to take forward into a transformation design phase

What are the right attractive and alternative offers to LA transport we want in Sandwell?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- In only 22% of calls with parents and carers we found that alternative offers were discussed
- Sandwell has 2 different offers to LA transport whereas most other LAs have only 1 other offer
- The PTB offer is more attractive than neighbouring LAs

How do we engage with parents and carers effectively?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- We have been unable to capture parent and carer voices throughout the diagnostic.
- Changing the offer for children and young people can significantly impact parents and carers and needs carefully thinking, planning and executing a communications strategy .

Enablers for this opportunity

Effective Communication with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers need to be informed of all offers and engaged in the right way about the appropriateness of them

Colleague Capability & Capacity

We need to have sufficient capability to discuss our different offers and the benefit they may have for families

Cultural Landscape

We need all of our teams to be thinking about the offers and the attractiveness of them in the same way

Local policies and process

How do we ensure we robustly apply our policy in all of our processes?

Vehicle optimisation: focus areas and findings

Context

84% of children and young people with SEND receiving travel assistance in Sandwell, travel to school via local authority vehicles.

Local authority vehicle provision can be optimised by considering and strategically planning routing and vehicle allocation, whilst allowing for children and young people's individual needs and requirements.

At the moment, the process of allocation a child/young person to a vehicle is as follows:

1. TAS receives TARF & TASPIF form
2. Child details are sent to the transport operator for the school/area
3. Operator suggests which vehicle to be added to/new vehicle
4. TAS checks routes for journey time & mileage
5. Route and vehicle type accepted
6. Schools & parents and internal records are updated

Operators make the decision on vehicle allocation. They are incentivised to use as many vehicles as possible, since the per-vehicle fee charged is high. TAS manually verifies routes suggested by the operator using RAC router for journey time.

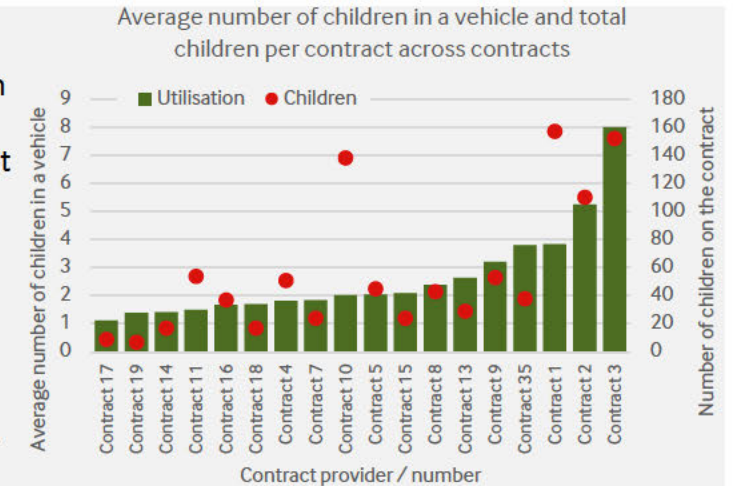
Data analysis has been limited to date, as information on vehicles and routes on which children/young people are currently transported are captured across different systems and multiple spreadsheets.

Summary of Findings

The number of children we can transport in a vehicle is dependent on many factors including the child's needs. Across different contracts, we see a large variation in the average number of children in a vehicle, ranging from as few as 1.125 child per vehicle, up to 8. When vehicle contracts were tendered in 2022, the average number of children/young people per vehicle was **3.98** – **in May 2024 it was 2.4**.

We analysed the existing allocations of children to vehicles with a model to understand if children could be transported in groups more efficiently: **235 routes** reviewed in line with current contracts via an optimisation model. These vehicles transport **535 children/young people**, which is 50%+ of the caseload. 8 key constraints to do with passenger needs were accounted for, including drop-off and pick up times, need for travelling alone or a PA, wheelchair and equipment needs, and total journey duration (capped at 40 minutes).

Running the optimisation model on 2 contracts that were taken to be indicative of opportunity across the wider fleet allows us to calculate a daily cost avoidance. Note: This is based on SEND2's procurement framework, and due to the work ongoing in SEND3, this could result in the need for a re-evaluation of the financial opportunity.



Opportunity and next steps in relation to vehicle optimisation in Sandwell

To access the opportunity outlined, there are several key considerations to take forward into a transformation design phase:

How can we ensure data capture and systems enable effective analysis and data-led conclusions to be drawn?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- Current data capture on vehicle types, children and young people's needs, and schedules is error-prone and fragmented across multiple spreadsheets
- Collating this data, and ensuring an effective way to capture, understand, and categorise constraints is crucial to run optimisation modelling
- Colleague capability and confidence in capturing, analysing and modelling data will need to be understood and developed where necessary

How do we engage with parents and carers effectively and work with our operators to have the optimum routes and vehicles?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- We have been unable to capture parent and carer voices throughout the diagnostic.
- Changing the routes and vehicles for children and young people can significantly impact parents and carers and needs carefully thinking, planning and executing a communications strategy
- Our process relies on operators currently telling us the optimal vehicle and route and TAS checking resulting in an "us vs them" culture

Enablers for this opportunity

Effective Communication with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers need to be informed of any changes to optimisation and we need to refer to what we have in our policy (which is align to national policy)

Colleague Capability & Capacity

We need to have sufficient capability and capacity to discuss changes to routes and pick up times with parents and carers

Development of market and collaboration with vehicle operators

How do we work with operators to ensure have the most effective routes and vehicles for our children and young people we need to transport?

Data and Systems

We currently capture data in different tabs for different vehicles in excel spreadsheets resulting in 100+ tabs and spreadsheets.

What would need to be true in order to realise the opportunity?

The existing systems and processes make it difficult to find the most optimal journey groupings

TAS receives TARF & TASPIF form

Child details are sent to the transport operator for the school/area

Operator TAS suggests which vehicle to be added to/new vehicle

TAS Operator checks routes for journey time & mileage

Route and vehicle type accepted

Update schools & parents, internal records, and perform vehicle checks

Annual review of support



Pain point: Data silos and data quality make it hard to see the current state and may miss where children are on the same timetable for some days.

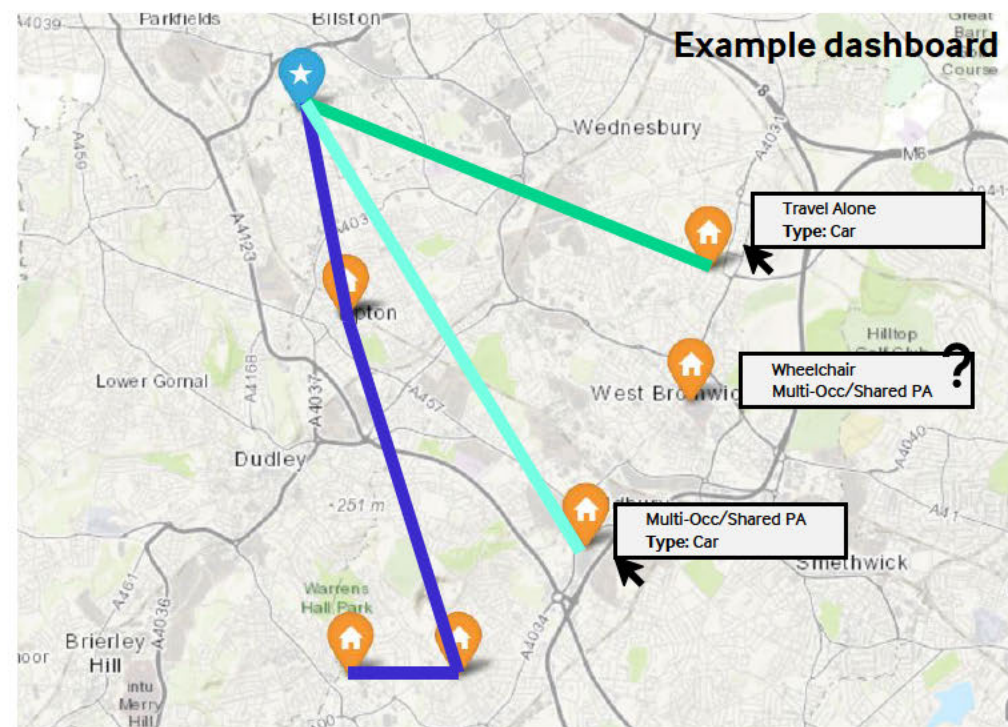
Solution: Un-silo data across different systems into a single source of truth.

“ [Data] is all over the place ”



Pain point: Manual routing and over-reliance on operator's suggestions

Solution: Visualization to support contract officer's decision-making with all related information on one page and TAS's decision on which vehicle is required and proposed to the operators. While we have modelled improved efficiencies with an algorithm the human element is **critical** to have the right transport provision in place due to complexity of needs



Eligibility

ITT & Annual Reviews

Optimal Offering

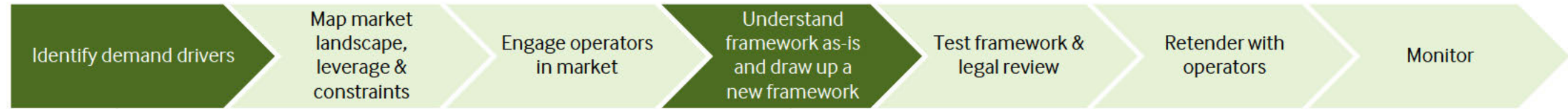
Vehicle Optimisation

Procurement

Enablers

Next Steps

Newton's approach to working alongside the market to deliver the commissioning opportunity

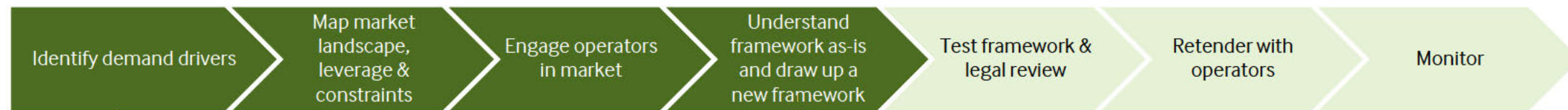


The diagnostic has enabled us to understand:

- What is driving demand for transport?
- How is this demand distributed across schools?
- What our current average costs are by contract, provider and current framework

This output has also helped inform SEND mini competition rules, but without engaging with operators and understanding the market, we cannot be confident in determining what would be the best framework and rates for the framework.

Newton's approach to working alongside the market to deliver the commissioning opportunity



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However, during an implementation programme we would:

- Engage with operators to understand the market landscape, their total volume and appetite for strategic partnerships
- Co-develop with certain operators a framework approach that delivers on: meeting the needs of Children and Young People, competitive offer for operators and a fair and good value price for Sandwell
- Understand the different variables/costs that operators face and what needs to be taken into consideration when building a should-cost model and how this differs by operator size (e.g. small, medium local, national)
- Multiple engagement events to understand appetite of operators to bid against proposed framework and potential costings
- Run mini-competitions through SEND3
- Develop a set of monitoring controls alongside SEND3 legal framework to monitor delivery and costs of new frameworks

Ultimately this approach focuses on ensuring that develop a competitive market that can deliver on the framework with good quality outcomes for children and young people

Opportunity and next steps in relation to vehicle procurement and contracting in Sandwell

To access the opportunity outlined, there are several key considerations to take forward into a transformation design phase:

How do we build a market that can deliver on a fair, high quality and good value for money framework?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- We don't know what operators think is the best framework for procuring their services
- There is a huge variation in the base cost and additional costs of the current framework
- We do not have a single view of this variation and what drives it
- We do not know how operators will respond to SEND3
- We do not know what the market looks like vs 2 years ago

How do we engage with parents and carers effectively?

In design, we need to answer the question above, addressing the fact that:

- We have been unable to capture parent and carer voices throughout the diagnostic.
- Changing the routes and vehicles for children and young people can significantly impact parents and carers and needs carefully thinking, planning and executing a communications strategy

Enablers for this opportunity

Effective Communication with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers need to be informed of any changes to their vehicles and routes

Colleague Capability & Capacity

We need to have sufficient capability and capacity to regular use should costing, analyse the costs of contracts and develop frameworks

Development of market and collaboration with vehicle operators

How do we work with operators to ensure have the most effective framework that they can deliver on?

Data and Systems

We currently capture data in different tabs for different vehicles in excel spreadsheets resulting in 100+ tabs and spreadsheets.

Eligibility

ITT & Annual
Reviews

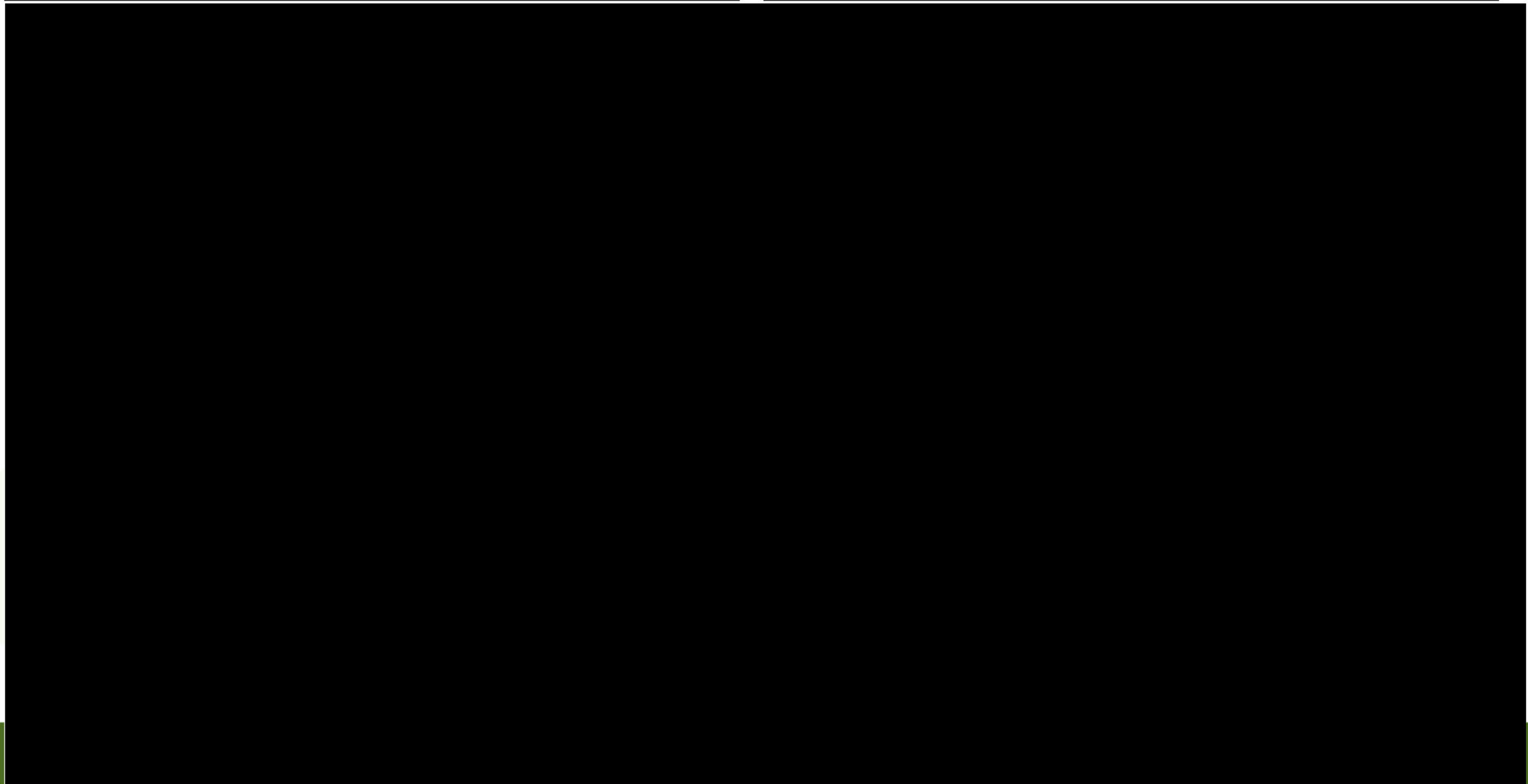
Optimal
Offering

Vehicle
Optimisation

Procurement

Enablers

Next Steps



Eligibility

ITT & Annual
Reviews

Optimal
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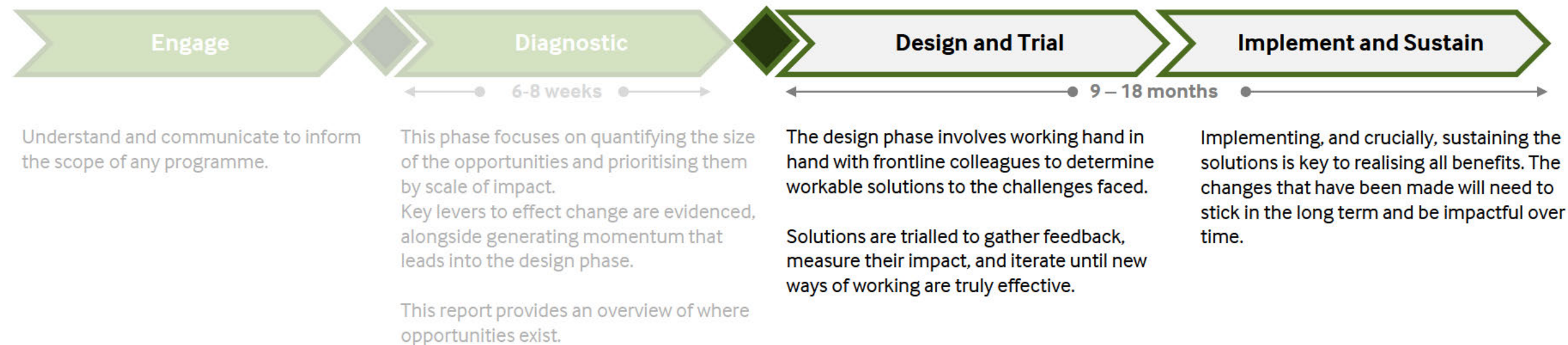
Enablers

Next Steps

NEWTON'S APPROACH TO TRANSFORMATION



Newton's approach to change is built on extensive engagement and a robust evidence base to build buy-in and momentum for change



Principles applied during a design and implementation phase:

- **Engaging:** actively involving all stakeholders - colleagues, parents, carers, schools, and practitioners - throughout the design and trial phases. This includes aligning everyone around a shared vision and common goals, ensuring that their voices are heard, their insights are incorporated, and fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the process
- **Collaborative:** working hand in hand with all relevant groups to co-create solutions. This joint effort not only leverages diverse perspectives, but also strengthens the sense of shared responsibility for building an effective and efficient service.
- **Iterative:** continually refining and improving change initiatives based on feedback and measured impact. This cyclical process of testing, learning, and adjusting ensures that solutions can better meet the needs of stakeholders, genuinely work within a given context, and will be viable in the long term.
- **Evidence-based:** relying on data and evidence to guide decision-making and validate the effectiveness of changes and approaches. Grounding in a solid evidence base means that we can ensure changes are not only innovative, but also reliably effective.
- **Build for sustainability:** Ensuring that all new ways of working are designed with sustainability in mind: from digital tooling and the integration into existing systems or data infrastructures through to ensuring the key leaders and managers for sustainability are involved from the beginning and own the changes

